

Portrait of a Servant

1. What is it like for you to know something for sure?

As you begin, remember—this whole section has to do with Judah's deliverance from Babylon, and their willingness to trust God for their return from captivity.

In this "book of comfort," God brings consolation to His people by graciously announcing His plans to them ahead of time. After spending seventy long years in exile, the Lord would raise up a mighty world conqueror that would free the captives and send them back to their homeland. But despite all the greatness and joy of the deliverance Cyrus would bring, he would not be able to solve Israel's deepest problem. Historical deliverance cannot change people spiritually. In chapter 42, we find Isaiah leading us to see a greater Deliverer who would come and bring about a greater rescue. He would deliver the people from that which caused their great calamities.

Thus, it is against the backdrop of the hopelessness of the exile that the true Hope of the world can be revealed.

Invitation to Pray: Thank God for disclosing to us the many dimensions of His magnificent character!

In the preceding chapters we were given a powerful portrayal of the awesome greatness of Israel's Sovereign Lord. Now, suddenly, Isaiah introduces a different theme. The majestic King assumes the role of a *Servant*! At first, the title "Servant" seems out of place among all the splendid titles Isaiah gives to God. Yet, as we will see here and in future sections, this term "Servant" may most fully display the glory and wonder of our Lord.

Read Isaiah 42. Then carefully observe verses 1-9. To uncover the significance of what Isaiah is saying in 42:1, compare 41:24, 29 and 42:1, using the NASB, KJV, or The Amplified Version. (The NIV fails to bring out the dramatic link between these verses.)

2. From your observations, what point is Isaiah making in 42:1a?
3.
 - a. As chapter 42 opens, who is speaking? To whom is He speaking? (vv.1-4)
 - b. Who is being addressed in verses 5-7? Who is overhearing what is said?
 - c. Who is being spoken to in verses 8-9?

In the second half of Isaiah there are four passages commonly known as the *Servant Songs*: Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. The Songs themselves pass before the mind as a series of prophetic visions. For a proper understanding of the songs, it is vital to keep in mind the two advents of Christ and distinguish between them. It is not unfair to say that the prophets could not always come to terms with what, at times, appeared to them to be contradictory concepts—suffering and glory. (See 1 Peter 1:10-12)

4. Look closely now at the description of the Servant God wants us to “behold.”

- What terms express this servant’s relationship to God (v.1)? Compare Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Isaiah 11:2-3.

- What do you learn about the mission of the Servant from vv. 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7? Also review Isaiah 9:7, 11:3-5, 16:5. (See if you can discern which advent is in view in the various phrases.)

- What do you observe about the Servant’s character (vv. 1-4)? (Compare Matthew 11:28-30, 20:28; John 13:1-17.)

5. Why is Israel not the servant spoken of in verses 1-4? (See 41:8-9, 42:18-25, 6:9-10)

It is clear that Isaiah uses the word “servant” to designate more than one individual or group. Remember, the context and the characteristics ascribed to the servant in each reference dictate his identity.

6. Among the servants of the Lord, there is One who has a preeminent place! The New Testament clearly identifies this Servant by name. **Read** and examine the following New Testament passages: Matthew 12:15-21, 20:25-28; Luke 2:25-32; Acts 4:27-31.

- What links do you discover between the Servant of Isaiah 42:1-7 and the *Servant* named in the New Testament?

It is vital for us to withdraw ourselves from life’s worldly cares and take time to “*Behold Him,*” our Servant-King! Pause now, and let your heart think deeply about truths we are studying.

7. This vision of what God will accomplish through His Servant is so exciting that Isaiah breaks into an ecstatic hymn of praise (vv. 10-13). What vivid metaphors do verses 10-17 use to describe the Lord at work?

Lessons from the Servant

8. In what sense does the image of “the servant” apply to all believers (Matthew 20:25-26; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 2:16-17)?

9. In light of the above, what does this passage say about:
 - a. Your relationship to God? Compare Romans 8:16; Ephesians 1:3-8; 1 John 3:1.

 - b. Your mission? Compare Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 13:47.

 - c. Your character? Compare 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

10. What would happen if Christians responded in gentleness and persistence to ensure fairness and justice for those around them?

11. What prayer or action can you pursue to become a better servant to the lonely, the hurt, and the weak? Ask the true Servant to guide you and enable you.

12. According to vv. 18-25, why did Israel fall short of her calling to be God’s servant?

Note: The fact that the Lord has appointed another and greater Servant does not mean that Israel’s own servant role has been abolished.

Read Isaiah 43. Observe the contrast that is introduced in verse 1! Look for the main thoughts and ideas that are presented in the chapter. Notice the titles that are attributed to God (vv. 3, 14a, 15). Also notice the personal touch in the promises of mercy and grace.

13. a. This section is filled with wonderful words of encouragement for God's people, both then and now. Sum up the main promises God makes to the nation in exile.

b. To what truths about God are the promises in this passage anchored?

c. Explain why this makes God's promises so certain?

In this passage, Isaiah is also pointing beyond the mere physical Babylonian captivity, to a more common spiritual captivity, which no one is able to escape by his own efforts.

14. **For your own heart:** Choose a section from chapter 43 that really grabs your attention. Study these remarkable promises of God until you understand them thoroughly. *Plan to meditate on a different phrase each day for the next week.* Then tell what makes this passage important to you and what applications you found for your life.

In this part of Isaiah's book, God is promising to do a new thing, and to set a new order in place. The infinitely creative God will take the sinful, the tainted, and defiled, and make them over again. He will take the brokenness of earth and make it right again. *This is holiness at work!*

15. Finish the lesson by reviewing the "Themes of Isaiah" handout from lesson 3. What insights or further questions arise as you contemplate this holy work of redemption?